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## **HOME HEALTH CARE PLANNING IMPROVEMENT ACT**

Advanced practice nurses and physician assistants are playing an increasingly critical role in health care delivery, particularly in rural or medically underserved areas with physician shortages. In 1997, Congress recognized these health providers' growing role and authorized Medicare to reimburse them so long as their services were within the scope of their practice under state law.

Under current law, however, physicians are the only providers that can order home health services for Medicare beneficiaries. In some cases, these physicians do not have a direct relationship with the patient and turn to nurses and physician assistants to determine if home care is medically necessary. Relying solely on physicians to order home health services increases the complexity of receiving home health services and may delay Medicare beneficiaries' receipt of home health services. The delay in services is particularly pronounced for seniors and disabled citizens in rural or medically underserved areas where the majority of care is administered by other qualified health providers and physicians are scarce.

The *Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act* ensures timely access to Medicare home health services for seniors and disabled citizens by authorizing advanced practice nurses and physician assistants to order home health services and to sign the final plan of care for Medicare beneficiaries.

### **BILL SUMMARY**

#### **1. IMPROVE TIMELY ACCESS TO HOME HEALTH SERVICES**

Instead of needing a physician's approval, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, nurse midwives, and physician assistants would be able to order home health services for Medicare beneficiaries within the scope of their practice under state law.

#### **2. ALLOWS QUALIFIED HEALTH PROVIDERS TO SIGN FINAL PLAN OF CARE**

Nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse midwives and physician assistants would be able to substitute for physicians in the face-to-face encounter requirement and to sign the final plan of care for Medicare beneficiaries' home health services.

**Endorsing organizations:** American Nurses Association, National Association for Home Care and Hospice, the American Nurses Association, the American Academy of Physician Assistants, the American College of Nurse Practitioners, the American College of Nurse Midwives, the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, and the Visiting Nurse Associations of America.